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TEXTBOOKS FOR CZECHOSLOVAK ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

[The following information was taken from a monthly periodical, Funkcionar, Vol VI, No 12, Prague, 25 June 1951.]

All Czechoslovak youths are required to go through elementary (narodni) and middle schools (stredni skola). Most middle-school graduates enter various professions, go to work in factories or in agriculture, or advance to schools of university level.

New textbooks have been published during this school year for all the principal subjects taught in elementary and middle schools.

The new textbooks teach the youths about their homeland and its working people, about its ally the USSR, and about all the people of the world who are fighting for peace and freedom. They teach the youths to honor labor, especially the labor of workers and farmers.

The textbooks use phenomena and examples from socialist life, particularly in the factories and on the farm.

The new textbooks, however, have certain shortcomings which must be overcome in working with them and in future editions.

The greatest shortcoming from which all textbooks in the elementary and middle schools suffer is the lack of an aggressive attitude on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and a compromising attitude in questions of world outlook. An attitude of reconciliation toward the influences of various bourgeois ideologies is also visible in them.

- 1 -

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The textbooks do not yet make sufficiently clear the importance of eliminating capitalists and large landholders from power and of elevating the working class to positions of leadership. The difference between the pre-Munich republic and today's People's Democratic Czechoslovakia is not yet clearly outlined. The superiority of the present-day social, state, and economic regime is not shown sharply enough. The textbooks do not show convincingly enough how high socialism stands above capitalism.

The textbooks do not indicate clearly enough the basic distinction between the ideology of the pre-Munich republic, represented particularly by T. G. Masaryk and Dr E. Benes, and the ideology of scientific socialism, which means a real humanitarianism, a struggle for the happiness of the people, and for national independence, in alliance with the USSR and the forces of peace throughout the world.

Efforts must be made in the schools to overcome these shortcomings and to use Czechoslovak life, the development of the USSR, and the growing strength of the socialist camp, to point out the enormous superiority of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. The schools must show how many struggles were fought and how many victims suffered for generations to attain today's results; they must teach youth respect and love for the Communist Party; they must teach love and loyalty to the great leaders Stalin and Gottwald.

The school curriculum must overcome the influence of antiscientific obscurantism and superstition. The training of youth in Czechoslovak schools must be based more firmly and more extensively on a scientific world outlook, on dialectical and historical materialism.

The outstanding holidays of present-day Czechoslovakia, such as May Day, 7 November, 9 May, etc., must be mentioned in the textbooks and in class.

Training for socialist patriotism must be considerably intensified, the progressive tradition in the history of the Czech and Slovak peoples must be realized, and youth must be fired with love and devotion to their homeland and to the people. Youth must be trained in love toward the liberating army of the USSR, to the new Czechoslovak People's Democratic Army, and to the National Security Corps, which stands guard over the achievements of socialist construction.

School teaching, together with the activity of pioneer groups, must improve the physical capabilities and the health of the students, and must train the students in disciplined behavior, in willingness to sacrifice themselves, and in preparedness for defending their work and their homeland.

The existing textbooks do not acquaint the students systematically and decisively with the importance of the key branches of the economy, those of heavy industry. The school curriculum should arouse in the youth a lively interest in technology, a desire to stand in first place in building socialism, the wish to be a miner, a metallurgical worker, a worker in a machine-building plant, a tractor operator, etc. The curriculum must be supplemented by examples from work, particularly from heavy industry. It must also acquaint the students with the advantages of work in large-scale cooperative agriculture and with examples of Michurin science, particularly through practical work in village schools and in school Michurin plots, and by aiding JZD (Unified Agricultural Cooperatives). Much of this responsibility falls on the textbooks in natural sciences and in civic studies.

Other shortcomings in the textbooks result from errors in content and in methodology.

- 2 -

RESTRICTED

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New Czech- and Slovak-Language Texts

The new language texts for the elementary and middle schools will teach the children their own language on the basis of new and timely language material. These books must be subjected to criticism, however, in the light of Stalin's statement on Marxism in linguistics.

The textbooks for the elementary schools devote a disproportionate amount of attention to explaining the significance of individual words, and to classifying related words. Morphology and sentence structure are insufficiently emphasized; the teachers do not devote enough time to them for the students to master the fundamentals of grammar. The grammar texts are too complex and use language which is difficult for children to understand. The textbooks hinder language teaching by useless details, by presenting endless exceptions to rules, so that the children do not learn the subject, or do not retain what they learn. The language textbooks for the middle schools are also too difficult, poorly organized, and suffer from too many explanations of meaning, syntax, and morphology, at the expense of a systematic understanding of grammar.

In accordance with Stalin's statements on Marxism in linguistics, training in the native language is to be the main subject for pupils in the elementary schools. If children in the first 5 years learn to read properly, to write, and to express their thoughts grammatically and correctly, all further training will be easier for them and they will have the key for understanding Czechoslovak literature, the fundamentals of science, and socialist development. For this reason, in the first 3 years of training in the elementary schools, subjects such as basic studies, studies about Czechoslovakia, and their own language must be combined into a single subject in which the greatest attention will be devoted to reading, writing, and grammar. The children's study of the phenomena of the world about them will be kept in the closest possible connection with the study of their own language. In later years, particularly in the middle schools, increasing emphasis must be placed on systematic training in grammar, so that the grammar studied in each class will be a continuation of the material taught in the previous class and so that all of this training will be expanded into a single over-all system of grammar.

The basic language textbook is the speller. The first class of the elementary school has so far used the old speller, *Doma a ve škole* (At Home and at School), which uses the so-called global teaching method /a method involving the use of pictures/. The proponents of this method claim that it makes it easier for the children to learn to read. However, it makes later training more difficult, since the pupils do not learn the basic facts of their own language thoroughly. Therefore, this method must be eliminated from the schools. The new speller, which must be prepared and published quickly, must be based on the best experience of Soviet and Czechoslovak teachers of elementary schools.

Beginning in the first class of the intermediate school, the students are to become acquainted with the basic works of Czech and Slovak literature and with its authors; they are to receive a general, unified picture of the national literature. Also, the readers must not be a mosaic of selections from various authors, but rather must give a picture of the strength and beauty of the supreme works of Czech, Slovak, and world literature. Particularly in the higher classes of the middle schools, the pupils will become acquainted with outstanding works of progressive authors of other lands, especially the USSR.

New Russian-Language Textbooks

The new Russian-language textbooks will teach the youth the language of Tolstoy, Pushkin, Gor'kiy, Lenin, and Stalin. The pupils will become acquainted with the USSR and with the lives of the outstanding fighters for socialism and Communism; they will learn to love the USSR. They will master a language which will make it possible for Czechoslovak youth to unite not only with the country of socialism, but also with the People's Democracies and with the entire progressive camp throughout the world.

- 3 -

RESTRICTED

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However, the new Russian-language textbooks have shortcomings. The textbooks for the fourth class of the elementary school show remnants of the global method of teaching reading, since the students are encouraged to read before they know all the letters of the alphabet. All Russian-language textbooks, particularly those for the elementary schools and for the lower classes of the middle schools, should contain, in addition to articles on life in the USSR, information on Czechoslovakia. It is particularly necessary to publicize the unbreakable friendship of the Czechoslovak people toward the Soviet people and their boundless love for Stalin. The higher classes of the middle schools also must place more emphasis on Russian grammar.

The system of teaching Russian must be worked out so that, beginning with the fourth class of the elementary school, the pupils are taught systematically to read and write Cyrillic characters, and so that they will perfect their reading, writing, and speaking knowledge of Russian through articles on the life and work of the youth and working people of the USSR and of Czechoslovakia. The teachers shall point out the relationships between Russian and Czech and between Russian and Slovak. By the time they graduate from middle school, the students should be able to read Russian youth literature with comprehension and to express themselves in Russian in simple sentences, both orally and in writing.

Training in the fundamentals of the social sciences, particularly geography, history, and civics, can contribute greatly to the patriotic training of the students and to their understanding of proletarian internationalism. The textbooks in these subjects have, however, a number of shortcomings which must be eliminated.

Geography Textbooks

The geography of Czechoslovakia is taught three times in the elementary and middle schools. However, very little is taught about the USSR and the People's Democracies. Only a few pages in the geography textbooks are devoted to the People's Republic of China. The teaching of the geography of the capitalist countries shows the influence of bourgeois objectivism and cosmopolitanism. The choice of pictures also should have been made more carefully. The pictures of life in the capitalist countries glorify that life by pointing out the beauty of the countryside and the progress of technology, but conceal the true face of capitalism; they do not show the oppression and want in which the working people of these countries live. The textbooks also are full of unimportant facts which are not sufficiently developed and which do not belong in general geographic training.

Geography training should be planned so that the elementary schools will teach the basic concepts of geography which are necessary for the more intensive study of geography in the middle school. Work with maps of Czechoslovakia will make this much easier. The pupils will learn to read from maps and at the same time gain their first over-all picture of Czechoslovakia.

Geography teaching in the middle schools should be much better organized. An entire year should be devoted to the geography of the USSR. The students should be acquainted in detail with the People's Democracies, particularly with the People's Republic of China.

In discussing the geography of the capitalist countries, particularly of the great states, such conditions as the oppression of the workers and their struggle for liberation, the oppression of the dependent peoples in the colonial lands, and their struggle for national independence should be pointed out. The students should be acquainted in detail with the Czechoslovak Republic, with its mineral wealth, industry, and agriculture, and with the successes of planned socialist development.

- 4 -

RESTRICTED

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History Textbooks

History textbooks for the elementary schools should use detailed historical pictures to acquaint the children with the most outstanding periods and figures of Czechoslovak national history. Textbooks for the middle schools should acquaint the children systematically with the history of humanity from the earliest times to the present. They should also explain the histories of the Czech and Slovak nations.

Insufficient attention is devoted by the middle-school textbooks to the history of the USSR and of the People's Democracies. They do not point out emphatically enough the international significance of the Great October Socialist Revolution and particularly its influence on the liberation of Czechoslovakia. The textbooks do not depict clearly enough the life and work of Lenin and Stalin.

The textbooks for the highest classes suffer from too many historical details which obscure the significance of the main and decisive questions of historical development. The language used in the history textbooks is not sufficiently lively and does not succeed in arousing enthusiasm for the history of the working masses fighting for freedom. The presentation of Czechoslovak national history is not convincing enough to awaken in the pupils an unconquerable patriotic pride for the revolutionary traditions of their people.

The main shortcoming of the history textbooks, however, is their compromising attitude toward the historical-materialist concept of the development of human society, which is visible particularly in the presentation of Czechoslovak national history. This attitude must be completely eliminated from the textbooks. It is particularly necessary to present a true description of conditions in the pre-Munich republic. The bourgeois antipopular and anti-Soviet policies of the governments of that period must be clearly unmasked and the true reactionary character of T. G. Masaryk and Dr E. Benes must be pointed out. The progressive role of the USSR in Czechoslovak history and the struggle of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to throw off the capitalist yoke and to build socialism must be clearly explained.

History teaching in the middle schools must be organized so that more time will be devoted to modern history, from the Great October Socialist Revolution to the present. The history of the Czech and Slovak nations must be given not as an adjunct to world history, but as the backbone of history training.

Civics

The system of teaching civics must be fundamentally changed. The tendency to include in civic studies material from several other subjects and to underestimating civics itself is wrong and injurious. This would make the socialist training of youth a secondary subject, whereas the spirit of Marxism-Leninism must penetrate all subjects taught. The tendency to introduce difficult articles on political economics or on dialectical and historical materialism into the teaching of the middle schools also is wrong, since these subjects are too advanced for children in the unified [sic] schools.

Training in civics in the middle schools should be based on the constitution of the republic, on the policies of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, of the National Front, and of the government, as well as on the constitution of the USSR. This teaching should be concentrated in the third and fourth years of schooling.

In all social science training, the importance of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and of President Gottwald should be emphasized. More effort should be devoted to pointing out examples of revolutionary fighters of the Czechoslovak and international working-class movement, especially Lenin and Stalin. This will combine training in Soviet patriotism with training in proletarian internationalism.

- 5 -

RESTRICTED

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If the elementary and middle schools are to train conscientious and educated workers and farmers, they must devote more attention than heretofore to the future life of these students. This means encouraging love for work and the mastery of basic working methods. It means more orientation toward mathematics, natural sciences, physics, chemistry, and biology.

Training in the natural sciences not only has a practical significance for the future activity of the graduates of middle schools, but it also plays an important role in the struggle against obscurantism and superstition, in the struggle for the adoption of a scientific materialist world outlook by the youth. The teachers of the natural sciences should teach the students to understand nature on the basis of the most advanced science and should train the young people to transform nature.

Mathematics Textbooks

The textbooks on mathematics, calculation, and measurement contain very extensive material for all 9 years of the compulsory unified [sic] school. The textbooks for the middle schools, however, still are not capable of solving the problems of the Czechoslovak economy, of the factories, and of the JZD.

In teaching mathematics, the teacher must realize its significance for the development of abstract thought and the logical understanding of events and facts. However, the existing middle-school textbooks err in not applying logical thinking to the problems of contemporary life. The effort to develop abstract thought in the students should not result in burdening the mathematical curriculum in the middle schools. The system of teaching mathematics in the elementary and middle schools should be re-examined and a single over-all system of basic mathematical facts and methods should be worked out.

Natural-Science, Physics, Chemistry and Nature-Study Textbooks

The natural-science, physics, chemistry, and nature-study textbooks in general give a true picture of nature. However, they should devote more attention to practical application. This does not mean the systematic elimination of the fundamentals of these sciences, but rather that these explanations should be combined with the scientific principles of modern production: with trips to state farms, to JZD, and to industrial enterprises; and with practical work in school classrooms, laboratories, and workshops, on Michurin plots, in school gardens, etc.

In the fourth and fifth classes of elementary school, the children are taught the basic concepts of nature. The textbooks on animate nature for the fourth year of the elementary schools discuss the most common plants and animals. They deal little, however, with the effect of man upon animate nature and with the transformation of nature. They do not encourage an understanding of the mastery of nature by man.

The textbooks on inanimate nature for the fifth year of the elementary schools do a good job of acquainting the children with the basic forms and properties of matter, but sometimes digress into difficult aspects of physics and chemistry, particularly in the case of the general concept of matter. At this level nothing should be attempted beyond teaching the concrete forms of matter and their basic properties, particularly their utilization in production.

- 6 -

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The middle-school textbooks of botany, zoology, geology, physiology, physics, and chemistry are based on the most modern scientific information. They suffer, however, from too much material, as a result of which the basic natural laws become obscured. For example, *Nauka o chloveku* (The Study of Man) is worked out so exhaustively that it is much more appropriate for institutes of higher learning than for the middle schools. For this reason, the study of the natural sciences in the middle schools should be organized so that individual facts will be related and will remain longer in the memories of the students. The textbooks of botany and zoology should devote more space to the practical application of the research of Michurin, Lysenko, Vil'yams, and other Soviet natural scientists.

Special attention should be devoted to improving the polytechnic education of youth in the fourth year of the middle schools.

The above shortcomings and others in the new textbooks for the elementary and middle schools must and can be overcome primarily in daily school work based on these textbooks.

Now that almost all the basic textbooks are available, it is necessary and possible to put an end to teaching from notes in notebooks, which was previously unavoidable. All teachers must now use the new textbooks. All old textbooks which are still in the schools must be replaced by new ones.

Teachers still do not fully utilize the new textbooks in their work. Each individual teacher must acquaint himself with the new textbooks and base his teaching on them. All pedagogical periodicals, especially the new weekly *Ucitelske noviny* (Teachers' News), must make working with the new textbooks easier, by printing directions, experiences, supplementary articles to individual textbooks, etc. The kraj and okres pedagogic boards and the councils of teachers in each elementary and middle school must regularly discuss the use of the new textbooks. The experiences of teachers with the new textbooks are to be collected and integrated by the Pedagogical Research Institute.

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- 7 -

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